

# It Takes All Kinds Literary Zine

11th Issue

Welcome to the 11th issue of It Takes All Kinds Literary Zine! This issue is packed full of stellar writing and stunning images, starting with the cover from the inimitable John Patrick Robbins. I've been fortunate to have his covers for several of the issues since I brought the zine back from extended hiatus. The back cover is by Sonja Berry, and is one of three pieces from her in this issue.

A couple changes going forward: the submission guidelines have been updated. I've also decided to change the publication schedule to three times a year. Issue 12 will be out (fingers crossed) in February 2024, following with June and October. See the Submission Guideline page for more information: <https://www.motusaudax.com/p/submissions.html>.

I hope you enjoy Issue 11.

Skaja, 12 October 2023



Image by Skaja Evens

not everyone is the same by linda m. crate

i sat in church pews  
looking at the cross,  
staring out stained glass  
windows;  
praying to be saved from  
myself—

but no matter what i didn't  
magically become cured of being  
queer because it's not a disease

nor something to be cured with  
religion—

had to lose my fear of hellfire  
before i could find my real self  
left behind in the embers,

i brushed her off and helped her stand;  
and now i embrace my rainbow heart—

love is love,  
and as long as everyone is  
respected and treated with compassion  
and empathy;

then that should be enough—

not everyone is the same,  
we're not meant to be;  
humans echo the diversity that we  
find beautiful in the world and it's about  
time we embrace each other despite our  
differences.

the song  
of a village herdsman  
*Damboa village –  
surrounding grassland  
the cows graze freely*

Christina Chin  
*Uchechukwu Onyedikam*

### Winnitow By Keith Pearson

So she took his hand and they walked the worn path that followed the curves of the slow moving creek until they entered the cool shadows created by a canopy of ancient trees. Under the trees there was just enough of a breeze to shoo away the summer bugs and he watched her pony tail move with the rhythm of their steps. The path dead ended at a sharp bend in the creek where the trees fell away and there was a small sandy beach bathed in sunlight. It was early enough in the day that the sand was still cool and they sat across from each other, her long skirt tucked between her knees, and they talked of how the village of Winnitow had changed and how it had not and the people that were gone and those who were not. While she spoke he watched her soft mouth as he could not meet her eyes and he heard the creek as it tossed over the rocks at the bend and rippled its way east toward the big lake. He wished they had brought something to eat but her mother was making lunch for them at the camp and would be expecting them hungry, and soon. She grew silent as did he and they looked up at the growing sun and the birds hopping among the tall trees and he sighed and smiled at her. He stood and offered his hand and helped to her feet and she brushed sand from the long skirt as he did from his jeans and again she took his hand and they reentered the cool shade and followed the worn path in the direction of the camp and he knew they would never be there again and already he was dreading forgetting any moment of it.



Image by Sonja Berry



**As Might Be By Hiram Larew**

May doesn't know don't

Every up-pulling branch  
or high wing of rain  
says *Come May* over and over  
again and again

Even shyly is curling as might be  
in new bundles  
And *It's here now* is too

They are all made of just-discovered

Twigs' green is like that --

In May-made eyes  
sloping is fine  
asking and eager  
with weeds everywhere

Everything is May's cousin

So whatever you do  
Be mostly *why not*  
Be filled with such May evenings --  
Be often and somehow  
Be porch lights  
for every dusty moth waiting



Images by Skaja Evens



Is There A Chill Or Is It Just Me? By Toni Parisi

He said, baby, how bout a blowjob?  
So I looked him in the eyes.

Slowly kissed down his chest.  
Then got up and turned on the fan.

And snuggled up next to him.  
As I replied.

There you go baby, no need to thank me.

Did I mention I'm a natural blonde and smart ass as well?

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There Are No Lap Dances In Heaven By Frank Murphy

And the jukebox probably sucks so I will catch where it's a tad bit warmer  
all year round.

As Adolf sits in a corner, largely muttering to himself why did he create  
such a mess and God awful plague.

While nobody ever seems to ask for his shitty beer because even Satan  
isn't a big enough prick to sling that piss silver bullet skank water.

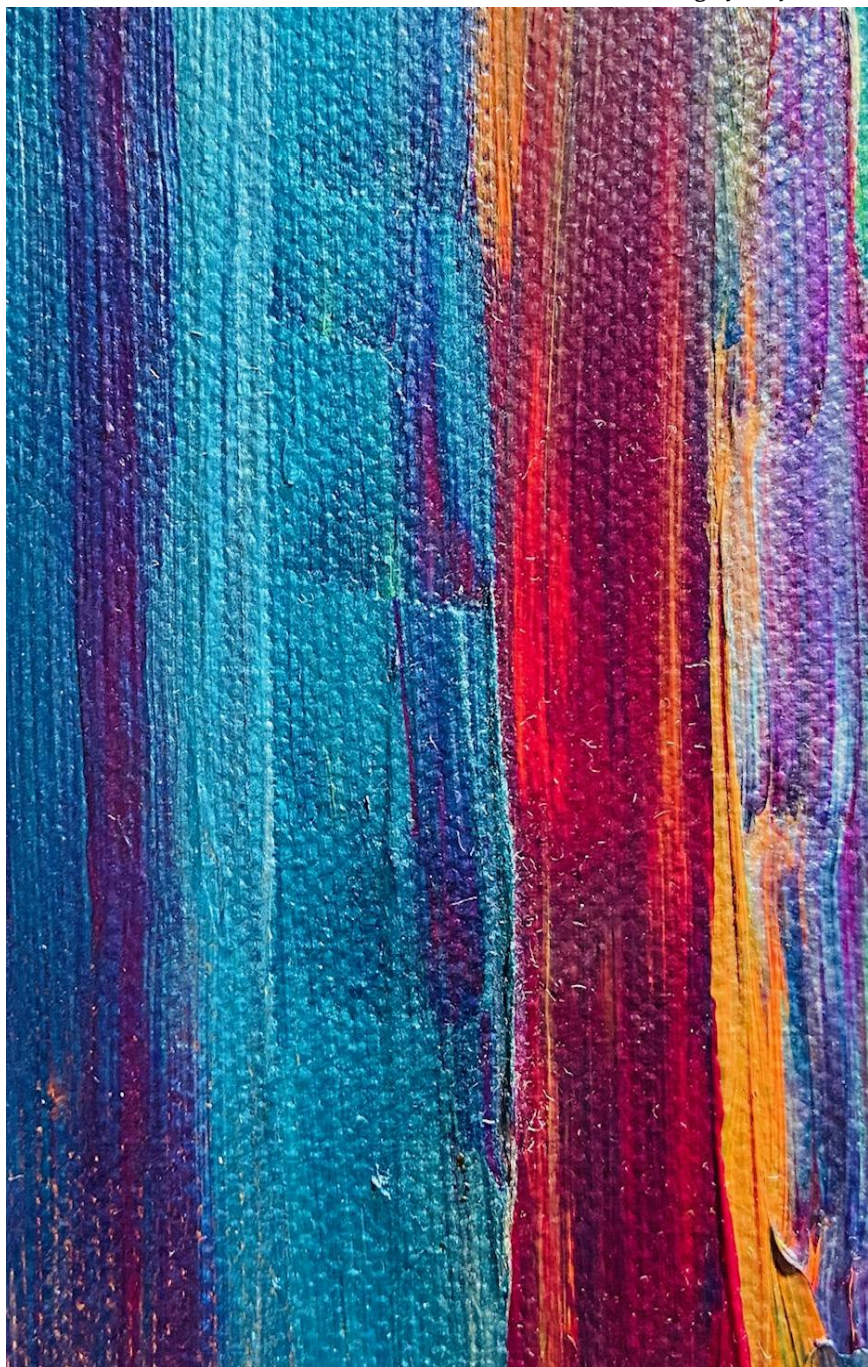
What, did you think I was talking about Hitler instead of Adolf Coors?

I mean, that tool bag is now a five hundred pound feminazi down in the  
good old Midwest probably hitting a poetry reading as we speak.

Yes, there are worse fates worse than eternal damnation and most of  
them involve the Midwest or Canada.

What's the difference between one clogged toilet from the next?

Shit all stinks equally the same.  
Au revoir, sugar tits.





Finally hot again by A. R. Tivadar

It's over 30 degrees Celsius outside  
We used to whine and complain  
about winter prolonging its stay  
About rainy and gloomy spring  
About warmth that would not last

The air feels like someone opened an oven  
Soothless breeze blowing on my face and through my hair  
On my legs exposed by office dresses and pencil skirts  
As I clock out of my air-conditioned job every afternoon

When I was little - and I still do -  
I went during summer vacations  
Up high in the mountains  
Where we had to wear track suits and long sleeves  
When we returned the hot summer air felt choking  
We dreaded opening the car windows or arriving home

My skin feels covered in honey, sticking to every surface  
My face is glowing, cheeks once covered in acne now shiny-wet  
My hair, that I refuse to cut short, is glossy and itchy  
My feet feel almost too light in sandals, in skirts I feel almost naked

I wear a black house dress with spaghetti straps  
With prints of pink exotic flowers  
That I used to wear all the time growing up  
When it was too hot for pants of any kind

We called it the "paravan dress"  
Using it as cover for changing into bikinis  
or just any other clothes  
When we were out on picnics or trips,  
When we played between trees and along river streams,  
When we ate watermelon and my dad's grilled meat

I plan on taking days off work  
to go to the mountains again soon  
I'll have to pack warmer clothes  
Dig them from the back of closet  
Like I did with my paravan dress



Predictable by Lynn White

I feel such a bright energy  
flowing,  
zipping through my veins.  
I can't wait to move with it,  
to uproot myself,  
to be transplanted and reborn,  
to recreate myself  
at the time when all of nature  
is recreating itself and starting  
afresh.  
I will be reborn too in another  
place.  
I've done it before and felt the  
new buds open,  
bursting and shooting into a new  
life.  
I've felt the excitement of the new  
spaces,  
embraced the interest in the new  
peoples' faces.  
And then..  
I've opened up my blowsy petals  
and  
let my heart show through  
pulsing,  
exuberant,  
ready

to turn towards the summer sun,  
not believing it will destroy  
my bloom,  
make my petals fade and fall  
when the shock of the new wears  
off  
and the fresh green shoots start  
to brown,  
and prepare for the season of  
wrinkles,  
which always follows,  
as my life folds out as before.  
Soon I'll be getting ready  
for the ice of winter  
in this new place.  
A new place, but  
with the same person in it.  
To change where I am is the easy  
part.  
To change who I am is difficult,  
hardly possible.  
But without this change,  
nothing will change,  
except that summer will have  
gone,  
winter will surely follow fall  
and spring will be a long way  
away.

Image by Skaja Evens



AM & PM By Kimberly Horning

AM

drawbridge at sunrise Jurassic Park  
theme

PM

ornery

my neighbor plays Reveille  
at sunset

Images by Trina McDaniel



Deemed Unworthy by Skaja Evens

Enough people and circumstances  
Projected their collective  
discomfort  
With their own situations  
Onto impressionable children

Feeling like a misfit outcast  
Desperate to fit in and be loved  
The game is rigged  
We each feel like we're the only  
one





Alabama By B. Lynne Zika

A small clutch of sparrows,  
mouths skyward from a long  
telephone wire.

I love the ache of loneliness  
which lurks in the chill of  
autumn

and thought to love it most  
until my feet found the edge of  
heaven

in the grace of a woodland  
pond.

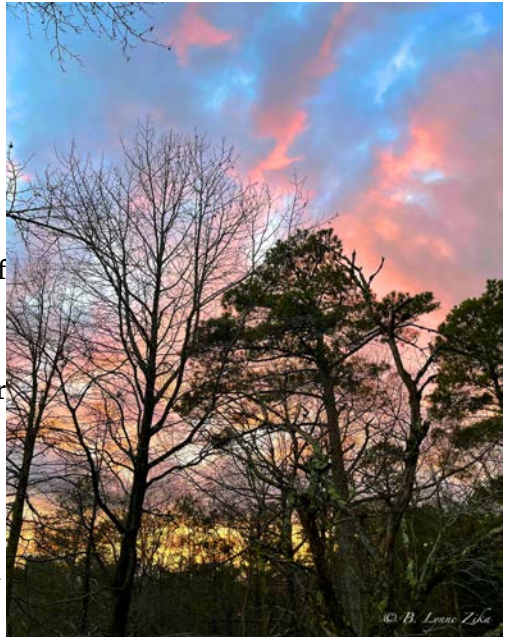
Glass green waters shone their  
mirror

to cradle the faces of  
cottonwood and hickory,  
while the jutting slate broke  
its footsteps

to a mincing waltz and carried  
me along a stream

to bury all grief in poplar.

I would have bent to brush my lips  
against the grounded leaves,



but a whippoorwill called, and how  
could I not answer?

It dashed above me to the  
open fields,  
vying with woodpecker,  
flirting with quail, and  
none counted me  
merely human. None  
scolded me  
for walking among them  
or chided my feet bare  
against the ground.  
None wished me gone  
or cawed their laughter  
when I lay  
with breast to earth,  
though whether to feed  
or be fed, I did not know.

I only knew there would  
never be arms  
in which I so belonged,  
not even my father's  
whose left me too soon  
or the small eager ones of my children.  
Perhaps those of the woman who taught me God.  
Yes, I think she knew  
how in the trees and soul of Alabama  
I am home.

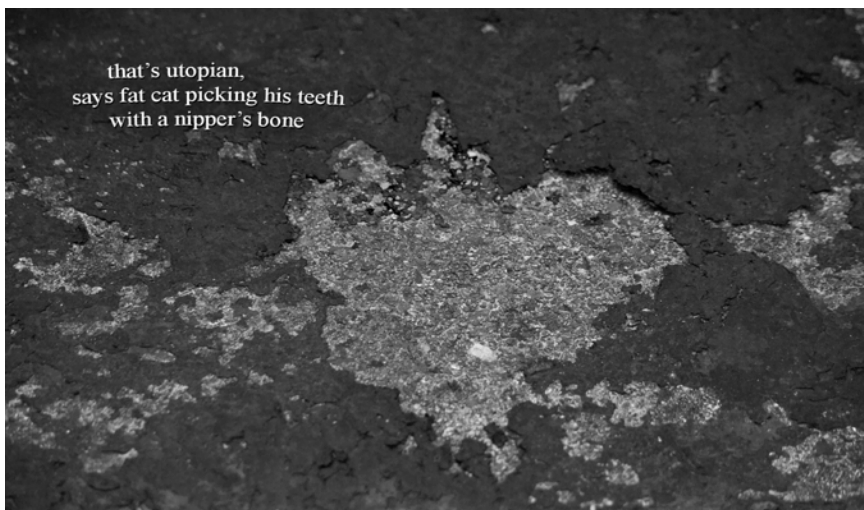


Images by B Lynne Zika



## The Journey by Keith Pearson

The trail deadended at two fallen trees and thick green brush. He turned and looked back at where he had walked. Somewhere the wide worn trail had narrowed to a rough path of exposed roots and jagged stones. He did not remember where it had changed. He could not see the beginning of the trail and barely heard the run of the river over the rock strewn bed. He stood a long time and listened to the sound of the woods around him. The sounds began to blend together and then slowly faded until there was only the sound of his own breathing. He took one last look at where he had been and thought of no reason to see it again, and with one strong step pushed his way forward into the thick brush and over the fallen trees, and into the unknown that lay ahead.



Utopian By Jerome Berglund

## There Are No Emeralds Upon This Isle by Ashley Karlsson

Only spent feelings and bitter hearts of a once promising future.  
You didn't say goodbye as I never said it was anything more than a waste  
of one another's time.

The lights are on, just consider me on permanent vacation.  
I will send you a postcard to put up that false front of all the good times I  
most certainly will not be having.



Salvation Mountain, Slab City, California by Curtis Blazemore

Jesus mounting the mount, spills words like hard candy on the ground.  
Ten second rule applies.  
We scramble for lemon drops and sour apples. He is opening his arms to  
heaven, the bag of it  
empty, angels' greedy mouths sticky with blood-red marshmallow,  
yellow chicks with heads bit  
off. Down here, parables ramble a verdant hillside, where grass is  
perfectly mowed, no bramble  
or weeds or stickers stuck in our feet. The crowd is entranced, sucking  
sweets, black dirt lodged  
between our teeth. When Jesus looks up, we look up. When he looks  
down, heads tilt in  
shameful frown. Rock sugar dissolves to spit under our tongues. The  
world is real, Jesus tells us,  
but we hear only evil in the whisper of stones and trees—mistaking  
saccharine poems for  
resurrection.



Image by Skaja Evens



if we could spill kindness and compassion  
by linda m. crate

the crows love the  
ravine behind my  
apartment

leading to the creek,

and hearing their  
excited shouts  
makes my heart happy;

i like that they aren't afraid  
to express their joy over  
little things—

i am like that, too, and sometimes  
people really listen;

but i find that people rarely  
listen to hear you but rather to  
simply speak—

i think the world would be a beautiful place  
if we were all crows excited about ravines,

yet had the patience and care to listen  
to one another's joys no matter  
how simple;

if we could spill kindness and compassion  
into this world maybe it would swallow chaos and darkness.

Blistering by Susan Isla Tepper

You capture silence  
in the palm of your hand  
outside it's raining.  
The moon has become  
blistering  
an affair  
you try and forget.  
Stay in, totally  
under the covers  
eyes blind.

## Club Underground by Kushal Poddar

A pighead DJ  
played colours for  
some masked figures  
dancing. As I pass one  
she asks, "What are you  
supposed to be? A human?"

No mask on my face, I didn't  
know, my friend would bring me  
here.

Am I one these days though?  
A performing human?

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## Cherish~ by Tracey Sivek

Thimbleberry wine on lips  
made divine by sweeping tongue  
she glides inside your deepest thoughts  
awakening in you a belief that it's all possible  
...her magic tastes like sunshine

An ache so inexplicable fills the well  
of souls, forgotten long ago  
decrepit screams are replaced by soulful moans

For lifetimes you have waited to taste the cherish  
of her soul, rolling essence of; inside a parched mouth  
succulence now moistens the very hunger you once felt

Nothing can be the same again  
it has taken you to a cannibalistic frame of mind  
always tapping the vein, wanting more  
...like heat on ice; burn and weep

She dances in the rain and walks in the stars  
tastes like the sweetest of wines  
speaks the languages of two legged, four legged  
and fae  
...can you deny her?

Cherish~



## The Christmas Cake by Sam Szanto

Niamh's mum made and iced the Christmas cake  
then figure-skated on it. Niamh watched her wobble  
away, pushing and dragging, stumbling and falling,  
rubbing her ankle. 'Maybe that's enough  
Mum,' Niamh said. Giggling  
her mum rose to her feet, one leg outstretched  
making shaky figure-eights. She pirouetted until she blurred.  
When she held out her hands to the sugar snowman  
he bowed and took them. They waltzed,  
gazing into each other's eyes.

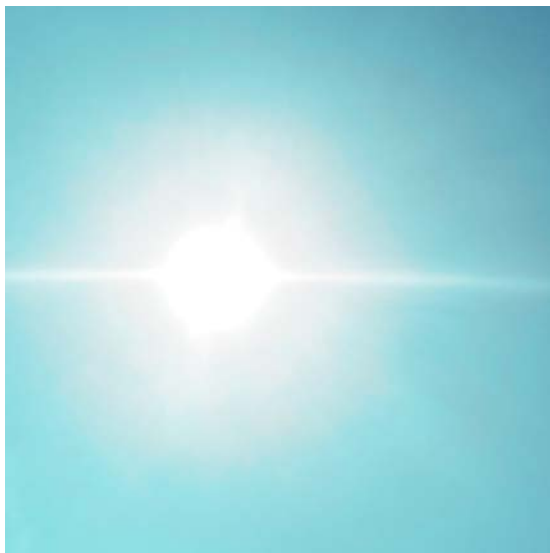
In the morning, the cake lay on the table, on top  
of it two tiny figures hand in hand. Niamh touched  
her mum's cold hard cheek. There was nothing  
in the fridge except uncooked turkey  
so she broke off the snowman's hat  
and ate that for breakfast. Before leaving for school  
she hid the kitchen knives in case  
that was the day her dad came home.

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## Maybe Tonight by Lynn White

As I close my eyes  
and meditate  
to ease my mind,  
I think of  
calm blue water,  
flowers and trees.  
Maybe tonight  
I'll sleep  
and my head will fill  
with sweet dreams  
of still water.  
Maybe tonight  
dreamily  
drowsy  
I'll dream  
of bathers  
in a calm blue pool.  
Maybe tonight I'll sleep.

Image by Skaja Evens



## What The Blue Teenager Sold By Michael Igoe

The blue teenager  
sold you something  
that will leave you  
alone and priceless.  
With the memories  
of handmade tattoos.  
His sleight of hand  
selling something  
for loitering in halls  
in pursuit of thunder.  
Whitewashing the wall,  
braying about routine  
as part a tired disguise.  
Since you have a notion  
of what each area is like.  
A tiny park expanse;  
the neon pizza signs.  
I gauged your walk,  
you walked behind,  
in a gait of a pacer  
from long years ago.  
The blue teenager sold  
everlovin' silent nights  
in the music of his sighs.  
Your wick still burns,  
your flames tells me;  
you wrote your book  
fed by a big machine.  
A merciless entombment  
with the Fates awakened  
weeping for days on end.  
It creases your head,

it will sell all to you,  
in the way of destiny.  
Pairs of crossed sticks  
glow on the exit doors.  
They're aggravations,  
and one is thing more.  
The dial light's glow  
is in luminous green.  
Casting a dim light  
on a phone number  
written on the wall.



Image by Trina McDaniel



Chelsea Creek By Michael Igoe

Yellow jets are flying  
over the Mystic River.  
Some are carmine  
removed further  
making no roar.  
Are they captives  
of the lesser suns?  
Like in songs we sang,  
when we were young.  
Often the blue building  
then a crumbling tower.

Asbestos sided houses  
with the cleared patch  
that eyes cannot pierce.  
It's the artist in you  
that defeats the need  
for a cure to disease.  
Like in children's books  
about a surefooted mule.  
I knew you as someone  
who surely plundered  
the Christian's coffers.  
You made the repairs,  
as seething mercenary.



Grinch Ending by Jerome Berglund

## Bubbles Under Ice By Hiram Larew

With those kind of eyes  
He'll get to be a grandfather  
He'll use them to stitch summers together  
Or to whistle high hopes along  
Or to find someone nestled  
And open their eyes like cider.

I think of this soon after it matters  
When sleet turns the bus window green  
And time comes in at a slant  
I think of it suddenly  
Like a sharpened pencil.

No one ever imagined how hard  
Getting somewhere else would be  
Crooners at their top pitch have some idea  
So do bubbles under ice  
And so do those who can wink at what's coming  
They're the ones who get spoken for first.

Image by Trina McDaniel



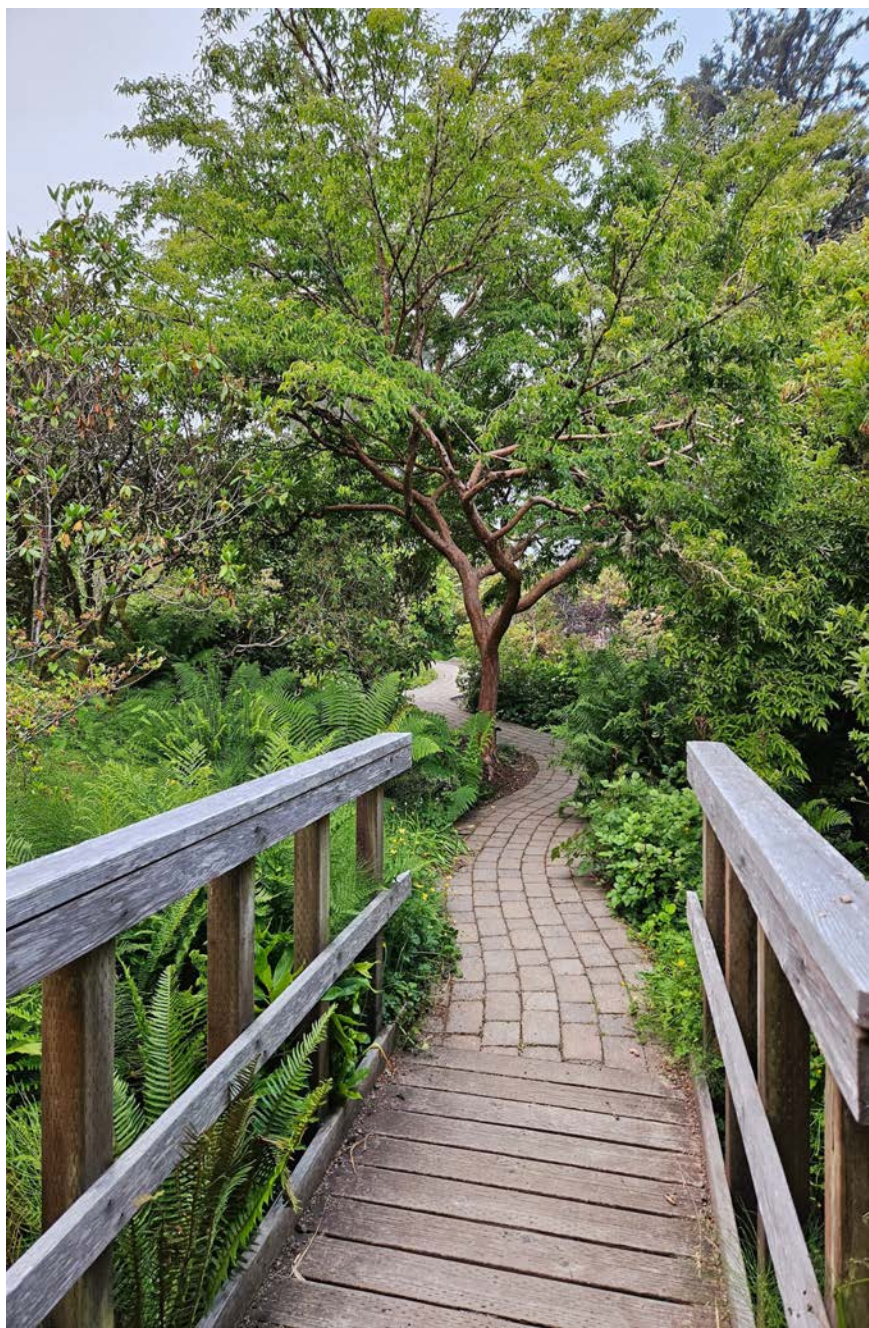


Image by Trina McDaniel

## Probing an A\*\*hole By Jerome Berglund

"Where are we?"

"That's the question isn't it?"

"Far from it. You're going to regret this."

"That remains to be seen."

"If you think you'll get away with this, you've got another thing coming."

"And what might that be?"

"You'll be drawn and quartered by Wednesday."

"Is that all?"

"I'll have you locked away in a dank cell in the desert for the rest of your natural life."

"That could be some time."

"After you're gang-raped by the Brazilian soccer team that I own!"

"Now we're getting somewhere."

"Blast, can we just skip all of these abominable, chit-chatting formalities and get down to brass tacks?"

"Ideally."

"Then what are your demands?"

"There are none to speak of."

"Surely you have demands."

"Not precisely, no."

"I trust you didn't whisk me out of my Bel Air steam bath at two in the morning just to shoot the breeze!"

"Well, actually."

"How did you pull that off by the way? I'd love to know, truly."

"It's unimportant. This whole operation is something of a larf, to be perfectly honest."

"A larf."

"I'm certainly not supposed to be talking to you presently, you see."

"I don't. *I don't see at all*, can you please for the love of God enlighten me and make it snappy?!"

"You're a busy man, I understand."

"Time is money"

"Of course."

"And I have a great deal of the latter."

"A modest understatement."

“Which makes the former precious and scarce by comparison.”

“A unique complaint one doesn’t typically hear, and why I’ve summoned you.”

“Can you turn a light on or something? I can’t see you. Did you put some sack over my head, it’s impossible to make out a thing in this darkness...”

“Don’t worry about that for now.”

“Well, enough with the stagey introductions. On with it then.”

“As I said, we’re not supposed to be down here mucking about.”

“Where should you be?”

“That’s irrelevant.”

“Forgive me. I’m accustomed to receiving straight answers to questions I ask.”

“We’re getting warmer. So as I was saying, does the ‘prime directive’ ring a bell?”

“I leave the nuances of automation to my engineers.”

“No, no. From Gene Roddenberry.”

“You must have had too much free-time on your hands growing up. I’ve been busy building an empire, don’t have the luxury of wasting valuable moments learning Klingon and prancing around convention centers.”

“Well, the Starfleet, you may or may not recall, were prohibited from interfering with alien civilizations they encountered. So as not to Mead things up.”

“Unrealistic, if you ask me. When they could so effortlessly have subjugated or wiped them out instantaneously, with ease using their vastly superior technology. Like the Spaniards’ modus operandi. Or worse, the Belgians’.”

“Most science fiction assumes a dystopian vision of the future, but the Trekkies were atypical, distinguished themselves by envisioning a rosier outlook for human advancement.”

“Naïve, bleeding-heart nonsense I always figured. Went against everything we know about human nature. Why, the notion is positively ludicrous.”

“That’s what I wanted to discuss with you, incidentally.”

“You call this a discussion? This is a kidnapping!”

“A friendly chat was what I was more aiming for.”

“How much will it take to get me back to my Egyptian cotton sheets?”

“I’m afraid you can’t afford it.”



"There's nothing I can't afford! My god man, I've got all the money!"

"Most of the money, that's true."

"Four hundred billion dollars, I'm worth more than the gross domestic product of Norway!"

"Again, what I wanted to confer with you regarding."

"Get to the point then, out with it!"

"I have a gentleman's wager with a friend you see."

"I can't believe this."

"He doesn't have much faith in your character."

"My character is unimpeachable! I'll have him publicly flogged! I own NATO, I'll track him down in Siberia if need be for this, there's nowhere you two can hide from me now!!"

"Do they have jurisdiction in Laputa?"

"Gulliver's flying island?"

"You know Swift, but not Star Trek?!"

"I was always more of a Star Wars guy."

"You went to private school, huh."

"I worked my ass off for everything I have bub!"

"We're getting off track. So we've established you have amassed an exorbitant amount of capital."

"By my bootstraps, earned every cent!"

"Now, what do you plan to *do* with it?"

"Why, make more!"

"Is that all?"

"Of course that's not all, I rule *everything* man! Have you walked down a street? I'm on any television set, they've statues to honor me in each town's square. Why, they worship me like a Greek god!"

"And what sort of god do you imagine yourself as?"

"A jealous, wrathful one!"

"How is that working out for you?"

"..."

"What if I were to suggest an alternative?"

"What, give it all to charity? They're viler and more unethical than I am."

"You're absolutely right."

"So what's *your* elevator pitch then, wow me."

"Well, you're more of a big picture ideas guy."

"At least you understand me that much."

“And crunching numbers is a lowly accountant’s job, which you presumably don’t dirty your hands with personally on a day-to-day basis, at least at this late stage in your career.”

“Management is all about delegating.”

“But someone who accrues a fortune has to retain some knack for figures and counting.”

“They always said I was a natural.”

“A model home can be manufactured for a mere hundred thousand dollars.”

“Sure, a shack for a peasant.”

“A billion dollars could purchase ten thousand such lowly dwellings.”

“Improvised cardboard boxes for a shanty-town.”

“Four hundred billion dollars could build four million modest homes.”

“Now wait just a minute.”

“There are half a million homeless people in the United States right now.”

“And that’s suddenly my problem?”

“You could single handedly eliminate homelessness in your country, and still retain three hundred and fifty billion dollars left to lord over them with.”

“It’s not so easy, none of that is liquid, it’s all *tied up* you know.”

“The richest men who ever lived, what did they do with it all?”

“Museums.”

“Okay.”

“Charities.”

“What did those accomplish?”

“Control! Hegemony! Tax shelters! More profits!”

“But to what end?”

“Peons like you will never understand that to be an end in itself.”

“So, thirty years from now or next week, when you crash on the Autobahn or one of your homemade spaceships goes haywire, and you’re wiped off the face of the earth, what are you going to be remembered for in the history books?”

“As a visionary!”

“What will your *legacy* be?”

“Innovation! I mechanized all the vehicles!”

"The persons who once drove them for a living sleep beneath underpasses."

"I'm a patron of the arts, like the Medici's!"

"And you're happy with that, that's *enough* for you?"

"You're bonkers. No one will ever forget what I did!"

"What did you do?"

"I made all this money!"

"So what."

"I beat the game! They got none, and I won it all!"

"A gluttonous miser, gorging on hot fudge sundaes before an assembly of mendicants."

"All look up to me, I'm a shining exemplar of success!"

"They'd tear you apart with their bare hands if they could."

"Well, to hell with them then. I hate the bums anyway!"

"But I thought you wanted to be their lord, to be revered?"

"Fear will have to do."

"That's what my friend said."

"If it ain't broke."

"I told him you were aiming too low."

"Are you kidding me? There's nothing I can't accomplish when I put my mind to it! Damn, I've got '*ad astra*' tattooed on my rump!!"

"I'm beginning to think you read a sight more than you're letting on."

"But so what, if I did that what's the pay-off in it for me, where's the percentage?"

"By parting with a quarter of your assets to end American homelessness?"

"Then I'd only be the second richest guy alive!"

"You could be the most beloved man in history."

"Bull."

"They'd start religions, real lasting faiths to celebrate you. Think about it, you'd be bigger than Jesus."

"..."

"And the Beatles. I'm not kidding. And imagine what this could do for your companies."

"You guess it would boost revenues?"

"How could it not?"

"...bigger than Jesus..."

"Why, with your spin-doctors and marketing team you could probably leverage that into some means of making yourself richer than ever."

"You think?"

"I'm sure your people could come up with a way."

"But then they wouldn't have to pay rent..."

"Do you want workers or slaves?"

"Well..."

"Which is preferable, a wife or a courtesan?"

"Both have their place."

"All things being equal, do you like living next to a neighbor or a tenant?"

"The tenant obviously, because he provides me income."

"Assuming you have enough."

"But I want more."

"And you have the nicest house on the block."

"Lessees have to treat you with respect."

"But do they ever invite you for dinner?"

"Bob Cratchit did."

"Okay, let's let that simmer."

"If they've all got homes paid for, who's going to take care of my landscaping? And pedicure my corns? Or maid my scullery!"

"I'm sure it'll get sorted somehow. Aren't your team inventing all kinds of intelligent robots?"

"But you can't f\*\*\* those!"

"Come now, you've visited Japan."

"I need to be the boss, and they need to be desperate or they won't work in my warehouses, fields and factories."

"Bigger than Buddha."

"You're taking the piss."

"Huger than Einstein, Mahatma, and Alexander the Great put together."

"You're going to lose this bet."

"Then *you're* going to be reviled and forgotten."

"Poppycock."

"Probably."

"You've wasted your time."

"Yes, but I just had to try."

"As though I don't hear variations of this selfsame spiel, thrice each and every day before brunch has even been served."



“Still, do consider it.”

“Gotta confess, bucko, you did half-tempt me a tad there.”

“I hope so.”

“My word, to be bigger than Jesus...”

“Wouldn’t that be something...”

“I’ll always know I could have.”

“You’ll have that.”

“It’s almost the same thing.”

“But not quite...”

---

Uchechukwu Onyedikam

Christina Chin

Image\_Belikova Oksana

oh man without  
nature in seasons  
as lýán to the tribes

cross legs under  
a sausage tree

## Door Frame By Hiram Larew

I want your body  
Not just your curls and stingers  
Or the hay in your heart  
Or salt in your pork  
Or inventions  
Or that door frame you live in  
Or your shelf with put-aways  
I want your body  
Not only what clouds let through  
Not what dew does  
Not what night means  
Not even how eyes fly  
Plain and simple  
I just want your body  
Even if it's smoke  
Even if it's wet wings  
Even if it's some piece of bread near soup  
I want your body from here to there --  
As if there will be time regardless  
As if deep down  
Just very somehow  
Right now is history.

---

## The Bookworm by Sam Szanto

*She's a bookworm, that one*  
Sara's headteacher said  
*Always got her head stuck in one.*  
Her mum said it was a good thing to be.

Sara got a stack of books for her birthday  
painted herself pink and started on an Enid Blyton  
munching the signs that took her to Kirrin  
where she devoured the treasure

at school Sara chewed up textbooks  
until there were woods and forests  
of words inside her. Friends avoided  
her and enemies called her *Germy Wormy*  
running along the corridors with carving knives  
to cut off her tail so she would multiply.  
She grew a new tail. The head  
called in her mother  
and talked about expulsion.

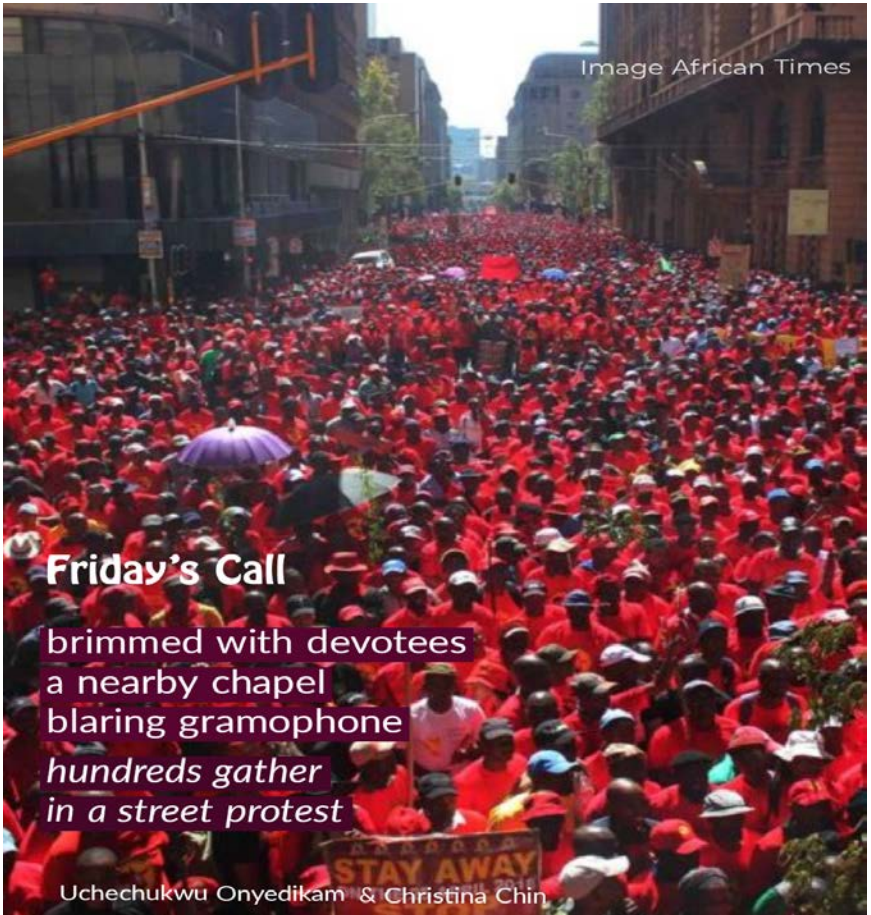
Sunk Cost In The Fallacy Of  
Meaning

By Skaja Evens

I'm breaking  
Cracks in the facade  
Scooping out water from a  
hole-ridden boat  
Hopeless desperation

I'm buckling  
The heaviness of responsibility  
Being the good girl  
Everyone before me, especially  
you

I give all of me  
For scraps in return  
Sentiments left  
unacknowledged  
As though I had said nothing



Scared of everything by A. R. Tivadar

Like a fist gripping my heart and squeezing it until it pops  
My sternum heavy like lead  
Frostbite burning through my skull  
Nauseating tingles on my thighs

Even before I finish taking in or comprehending what I look at  
The equivalent of mass hysteria erupting in my nerves  
Cheeks cracking like porcelain  
Rush to the toilet with burning innards

Often I'm not even scared or worried or bothered  
But it's as if I am two, prisoners of one another,  
A wounded animal, flinching at the slightest noise and biting before  
being bitten  
Chewing on its own legs

I try to calm it, ignore it, sooth it,  
Shush it, distract it, punch it,  
Scream at it, plead with it,  
Ignore it, hate it, pity it,  
Forget it, wonder why it even did it,  
Avoid it, guard it from it, sugar it,  
Then expose it, seek it, force it,  
Deal with it, get used to it, pity it again

When a creature dies it empties its bowels and rests soiled  
But I don't die, no matter how much my body aches. I flush the toilet and  
get back,  
Trudge on, soldier on, carry on

Like having an animal gnaw at your arm  
And saying "oh, I'm used to it,  
the scar's so thick I don't even feel it anymore"



*Uchechukwu Onyedikam*  
Christina Chin

Enish Nigerian Restaurant & Lounge Dubai

eating okara  
reminds of mother

*ogbono soup —  
thread by thread  
the slime binds our heart*

### The Ancestral Serpent Hibernates by Kushal Poddar

The colonial shutters  
show the x-ray vision  
of the room's ribcage.

The silhouette time  
tilts towards the midday.  
A bit of wind trapped within  
the chest of the house  
buzzes around on its  
blue wings' translucence.

You have to be one with the bricks.  
Breathe in slowly. Breathe out.

## Goodnight My Darlings by JPR

The children lay together, eyes transfixed upon the man who looked upon them with a sense of odd happiness as they were filled with that thing he admired most in children.

The sense of wonder and hope.

As he began the story, they remained in silence.

"Long ago, before the world was what it is today, life was hard but far more simple. And in a place that is not important deep within the country, there was a village that boarded a great woods that no one dared to venture within."

"But why didn't anyone want to go in it?" Tommy interrupted, to his little sister's annoyance, who shot him a look, as this massive man shot the little boy a look that instantly made him freeze.

"I'm sorry, Mister Harvey, I just was curious, is all. I didn't mean anything bad by asking."

Harvey leaned in towards the children, who slowly pulled the covers up.

"You know what happens to people who ask too many questions, don't you, Tommy?"

"Umm, well...."

"The wolves find them while they're sleeping and chew out their tongues so they can't ask silly questions anymore," Harvey said as he burst out laughing. Miranda put her hand on Harvey's massive shoulder.

"Cut it out, baby; you're going to give them nightmares."

Harvey reached behind him, squeezing Miranda's ever-abundant backside, to which she instantly giggled.

"I'm sorry, kids; I'm not much for sweet bedtime stories, probably just because I didn't get them read to me when I was a kid, is all."

"Tell me about where you grew up, Mister Harvey."

Miranda shot her daughter a look.

"Becky, you know Mr. Harvey doesn't like talking about his past."

"It's okay, honey; I don't mind." Harvey interrupted, smiling at the little girl who seemed unlike so many people, let alone a child, not to be afraid of him, unlike the little girl's brother.

"Well, sweetheart, my father just wasn't that type of man, and I never really knew my mother. I kind of grew up very isolated with my brothers. We only had one another. It was just us and the swamps and woods kind of boring stuff, I know."

"It's probably why your story was so boring and stupid," Tommy said as his mother snapped at him to apologize. Harvey had to laugh at the little shit's moxie.

He exited the room to go to Miranda's bedroom. He sat on the bed waiting for her, then laid down, turned off the light, and stared into the darkness as he had done so many nights alone before he had met Miranda.

Harvey thought about the compound. He thought about his brothers, and to a degree - although he could never admit it - he missed them, especially before the gathering.

October was a magical time to him, and although he said he was never read stories. He recalled how his older brother could pen the most horrific stories and recite them with glee as Lenard would cling to him as they both were terrified to sleep afterward.

But Harvey's older brother always took great pleasure in scaring people, and he had a gift for that.

It all seemed so distant; it had been a year since the last gathering on the island that was Harvey's true paradise; it was the only place he was truly free to hunt and, on those truly exquisite occasions, be alone.

He remembered how his father had allowed him to stay there alone for a week as a birthday present. It was a bliss he would forever cherish. The silence at night was so very beautiful. It was a peace everyone should experience, and so few ever truly did.

Harvey was lost in thought as Miranda slid beside him. She was lying in his arms, looking at the man who seemed at most times to be within his head more than with her.

"Baby, are you alright? I know you never talk about your family, but you know you can tell me anything. I love you. I hope you know that by now, at least."

"I know, there just isn't much to tell my father was a cruel bastard. I wasn't his real child anyways. I was just a dog to him. In fact, I was more like a rat in a cage than a dog, honestly."

"Baby, I'm so sorry. Why was he so cruel to you? You're such a sweet man; I just don't get it."

Harvey looked to Miranda as even in the dark; there was something that always allured him like no other had done for him.

"It's not something you want to hear, sweetheart; please trust me."

"But, baby..."

Harvey kissed Miranda deeply, just wanting to feel anything beyond the pain of a cold memory's sting. As their bodies moved towards that inevitable destination, Harvey - as always - fought the urge as Miranda, as always, could sense his deepest desires.

She put her hands behind her back. "I know what you really want, so go ahead."

Harvey didn't say anything as he grabbed his belt.



He quickly bound Miranda's hands, and he wrapped his hands around her throat; as the flood of emotions hit as always, her muffled moans were the ultimate turn-on.

She thirsted for the pain within the pleasure as equally did Harvey. As he tightened his grip and sank deeper within her, every thrust was more violent than the next. He only slightly released his grip from her throat to avoid total strangulation as she buried her head within the pillows, lost within her orgasm as Harvey soon followed suit.

Collapsing beside Miranda, who laid her head upon his chest.

"That was so fucking good, baby!"

Harvey said nothing as he was lost in that nether of ecstasy and the void that existed within him always. It seemed hours as they lay there entangled within one another's arms.

"You know, sweetheart, I've thought about going home just to set things straight with my family."

"Are you coming back?" Miranda quickly replied.

Harvey didn't reply as he thought to himself what truly entailed his returning home.

He knew a message had to be sent as he also understood to escape the depths of hell itself only to return to its smoldering gates was beyond insane. No dog had ever broken free of a kennel, and for the knowledge he possessed. He knew there were many who were ever so eager to snuff him out to prevent the elite's dirtiest of their little secrets from ever being known.

Harvey felt his heart rate begin to increase as he understood. Some demons of thought cannot be summoned or even suggested in whispered conversations shared between you and the night's labyrinth, let alone lovers of this plain of existence.

"Honey, please say something; if you want to leave, just say so," Miranda said, sitting up in bed.

"I'm never going to leave you, sweetheart. I promise you that." Harvey replied as he laid Miranda back, kissing her as he pinned her hands down to the mattress. She resisted only for a few seconds as in the pleasure's promise, as she surrendered herself eagerly.

As their twisted sexual pleasures gave her no reason to question, as he placed his hands yet again around her throat, his vice-like grip began synching in, and he felt himself stiffen as he recalled all the others as Miranda choked, reaching towards his face.

"Baby...stop."

She managed to blurt out as Harvey felt the ecstasy he had missed so dearly, the thrill beyond sex that was pure violence, for once a dog gets a taste for blood, it never truly goes away.

As Miranda's limbs flailed, Harvey felt himself building towards a climax ever so exquisite. He slightly released his grip with one hand; he reached for a pillow to cover her face. She struggled to break free as Harvey began punching into the pillow; he felt that surge that always came over him when anything cried out that always drove him to the brink.

As he repeatedly punched into the pillow again and again as tears escaped his eyes, as soon blood began to appear through the pillow as he lost count of how many times he struck that spot that stood between his fist and his former lover's face or what was left of it.

He only knew as he lay beside her in the darkness was the only time in his existence he felt something beyond pleasure and the ultimate release beyond violence.

He could not bear to look underneath the pillow at the aftermath.

It was all mechanical from there on out, from the point of little Tommy's annoying footsteps heading to the bathroom.

As sometimes, there is just an inherent sense of death that either makes a victim cry or, worst of all, say nothing. As the little boy noticed his

hand and just stared, Harvey quickly scooped the boy up in his arms and equally as quickly snapped his neck.

He tossed the annoying little bastard in the tub as he went to Little Becky's room. She awoke as he sat gently upon the edge of her bed.

"Mr. Harvey, what's...."

"Shhh, sweetheart, it's okay. I just have to go away and want to tell you goodbye."

"Please don't leave! I know my brother's a jerk, but me and mommy love you! We will make him leave before you have to!"

Harvey had to laugh as he hugged the sweet little girl that feared not even monsters like himself. "Sweetheart, your brother doesn't bother me. I just got to go home to set some things straight, is all."

"I don't want you to go; please don't leave!"

Harvey did his best to console the child, but compassion was yet another emotion he had been robbed of by his father and that Goddamned so-called corporation.

As he promised his return, at last, she calmed as he tucked her in.

"Can you just stay until I fall asleep?" Becky asked as Harvey quickly replied yes. He sat there upon the bed, waiting for her to fall asleep.

At last, she drifted off as she laid on her side, turning her back to him for that action he was truly grateful for.

He wasted no time in pulling the pistol from the back of his pants as he placed it to the back of the sweet little girl's skull, pulling the trigger as his ears rang.

He exited the room, not wanting to see the carnage of what he had created upon the wall.

He stood there looking into the bathroom mirror; he knew he could no longer maintain the facade of normalcy.

As he returned to Miranda's room as he grabbed her phone, and as if on autopilot, Tex dialed the number that he was told never under any circumstance to call.

The Colonel answered the phone on the second ring as he looked at his clock on the wall to see it was well after midnight.

There was an awkward silence as, at last, the voice came through that equally enraged and struck a chill down the Colonel's spine.

"Hello, Father; I hope I didn't wake you. I just wanted to let you know I'm coming home to attend your little party. I know how much you must have missed me."

The Colonel gritted his teeth as a vein popped up on the side of his neck.

"You show up here, and I'm putting you down myself, you bastard!"

Tex laughed at the older man's threat. Even against his brothers, they truly were no match for his wrath.

"Well, be prepared because hells coming, and I'm gonna make you suffer, you old son of a bitch! Oh yeah, check the local news in Luray, Virginia. I never strayed far. Well, I did visit another kennel. Of course, I'm guessing the other corporation members told you that. Well, see you soon, pops; tell my brothers to roll out the welcome mat. It's officially hunting season one last time."

He hung up before the old bastard could even reply. He knew his father and his backers would spare no expense in stopping him from getting home.

Tex quickly loaded the basics in Miranda's jeep as he paused, looking in the rearview as he watched the old farmhouse slowly be engulfed in flames.

As he passed a few firetrucks on the road as Tex buried what was a delusion others considered a life behind him.

There was no hope for an existence when you had been raised in the fires of hell itself. Tex was en route to his twisted family reunion to write the final chapter to this sick game or die trying.

The devil never sleeps; he's like a coiled serpent, simply awaiting the perfect moment to strike.



Image by JPR



Elegy in the Valley of Our Youth by Curtis Blazemore  
—for Cynthia Ann

How odd now to think of you, gone, no flash of eyes to look into, as I weigh on  
the sunlit sidewalk by our old river stone church.

You hum with me here in downtown Covina, June morning, the kind you've  
always loved, and I've been awake all night, listening,

talking to desert stars, reading your tender face out loud, listening for you,  
and like a radio I tuned-in to your voice that played

the blues night composes from the scent of gardenias and the gentle magenta  
cactus blooms that close their fingers at sunrise.

I shout your name, blind, the rhythm of your memory like phonograph records  
from our childhood. I've wept, knowing how you

suffered, knowing how we'll suffer loss, and how death is the prophesy we all  
fulfill. Still, my imagination sings remembrance,

dreams you back through this life, the old life, and the life to come. My days  
rush soon enough toward triumphant finale,

an end your time taught me not just to bear, but to grace, an end in bravery  
and vibrant color, like how brilliant sun cuts through

glass in this old river stone church, how coming home breaks through every  
grievance, how inside the copper pots and tin pans

abandoned out on my back porch rain will make the music of your name,  
little sister, as we who remain relearn the dance.

Image by Skaja Evens



## The Quiver Tree Forest By B. Lynne Zika

They called me even before it all happened.  
Yes, I think this was the beginning.  
They left a small opening in the undergrowth  
to guide my steps and even raked the path  
to lead me chronologically, giving me time  
to work up to it, to adjust.



The first tree dangled my lost slippers.  
They'd been hiding under a discarded bathroom  
towel  
all along, which Mother had bundled up  
and tossed in the hamper. We were late  
taking my big sister to school, and Mother said,  
"You find them in the next five minutes **OR**  
**ELSE.**

The next tree had a very small medallion  
looped over its lowest branch. My cousin Steve  
saying, "My daddy's richer than yours."

Next were the peanut butter crackers  
Miss Alice made me in first grade,  
my mother shaming me for allowing such a  
thing,

begrudging the sweet moments I had alone  
with my teacher. Mother would not allow anyone  
to think her unequipped or ill-prepared.

One tree was full of medallions.  
My father's praise over the first poem I wrote.  
The beautiful mountain house built by lovers,  
abandoned, their privacy constantly invaded.  
And me telling my father, "Then we have to leave,  
Daddy," even though the owners were already gone.

There was a dark tree with withered branches,  
its back bent, its limbs heavily laden.  
Here were the men with large hands,  
thick fingers, heavy tongues.  
From the higher branches hung the later ones  
who took—not bits and pieces for delectable bites  
and evil bemusement—but who demanded  
and took it all.

The forest was large. I could not see its borders.  
But the quiver trees put together a moss bank for me,  
even interrupted it dead center with a wayward root  
to avoid being too poetic. They were preparing me  
for my future. And the path did not lead by the year  
of my father's death. Too young. For both of us.  
It is a good thing to be tended by trees.

This was when I learned their language.  
This was when I became aware that all trees  
are connected to each other, mostly by root  
systems, though when concrete or oceans  
make such impossible, the wingèd ones  
gladly create the bridges and, truth be told,  
are rewarded for their efforts, though they do it  
without thought of return.

Before I left that day, a large brownish-grey feather drifted down  
from somewhere and landed at my feet. I was told  
to pick it up and then: "There is another kind of quiver.  
There's also quaver, lumen, and quill."

I believe I heard a chuckle,  
though it is difficult with trees to discern laughter,  
especially by sound alone. My instructor  
at the time was speaking from another part of the forest  
and so avoiding eye contact. I wondered why.

"You'll need this in years to come."  
Later I did trim it, dip the point in blue ink,  
and let it carouse around a piece of paper,  
sometimes dragging a leg, sometimes racing  
too fast. That quill held words  
I didn't even know I knew.

Yesterday, sitting in the backyard,  
I glanced over,  
and a root winked at me. I swear.  
It had the most bemused smile,  
as if it had a secret  
it had never told me, as if  
murmuring, "Just wait."





wish it didn't hurt by linda m. crate

usually i don't mind to be alone,  
but sometimes i get lonely;  
it doesn't get easier  
to trust people when you try to  
reach out your messages  
are all left on read no matter if it's  
something silly or something  
important to you—

told my mother that my greatest  
fear is being forgotten,

and i wonder if it's not becoming true;

she told me that it was silly  
that it would never happen but  
seems like no one has time for me  
these days—

and i wish that it didn't hurt,  
but it does;

i feel like that little girl in elementary  
school and junior high that wanted so  
much to be included, to be known,  
to be loved;

and i don't understand why the people  
that say they love you can't spare a moment  
for you when you need them when

you're always there for them.



Fugitive Scene By Michael  
Igoe

All that I possess  
I have assembled  
out of the ground.  
At a certain moments  
things are prefixed  
by everything I do.  
I am clearing a space  
far from the precipice.  
Both of these things,  
ground and precipice,  
are in certain order  
one denying another  
As Time is occupied  
with our inborn traits  
more than assessment.  
At breakneck speed,  
on a dried creek bed  
I made arrangements  
to ignite a forest fire.  
I could light that fire,  
discarding a cigarette.  
Flames rose around  
but I am not burned.  
Flat on my back,  
wild animals ask:  
“Am I the human,  
that runs in packs?”



Images by Skaja Evens



Postcolonial, Post-apocalyptic  
by Kushal Poddar

A myna invades  
the sparrows' cove.  
One bird guards the eggs.  
One tries to imitate a fight.  
Twice we intervened.

Twice we recalled  
a Smithsonian article  
on a Shakespearean disaster  
and about Schieffelin's starling.

We cannot undo some disaster  
without building a barrage  
across time and beginning  
another.

Twice we challenged fate.  
Today I fold my newspaper  
sighing that you already read it,  
know the chronicles.  
You ask how I may like my eggs  
but do not make any breakfast.  
We watch. We hear the shrieks  
and chirping. Rain has been  
charted.  
Outside the Sun shines hard  
instead.



+ **Skaja Evens** is a writer and artist living in SE Virginia. An eccentric misfit, she often listens to music, watches fictional crime dramas, makes art, and enjoys her cats' antics. She's been published in various places, and runs Môtus Audâx Press, producing *It Takes All Kinds Literary Zine* and *Disturb The Universe Magazine*.

+ **John Patrick Robbins/JPR** is a southern gothic writer. This is his work and that is all he cares to share beyond this point. Past victims: *Disturb The Universe Magazine*, *Medusa's Kitchen*, *Fearless Magazine*, *Horror Sleaze Trash*, *Piker Press*, *Punk Noir Magazine*, *Spillwords*, *The Dope Fiend Daily*, *Sava Press*, *Impsired Magazine*.

+ **Toni Parisi** is from Virginia her work has been published at the *Dope Fiend Daily*.

+ **Jerome Berglund**, a graduate of the University of Southern California's Cinema-Television Production program, spent a picaresque decade in the entertainment industry before returning to the Midwest where he has worked as everything from dishwasher to paralegal, night watchman to assembler of heart valves. He was recently nominated for the Touchstone and Pushcart prize. Jerome is also an established, award-winning fine art photographer whose black and white pictures have been exhibited in New York, Minneapolis, and Santa Monica galleries.

+ **Linda M. Crate** (she/her) is a Pennsylvanian writer whose poetry, short stories, articles, and reviews have been published in a myriad of magazines both online and in print. She has twelve published chapbooks the latest being: *Searching Stained Glass Windows For An Answer* (Alien Buddha Publishing, December 2022). She is also the author of the novella *Mates* (Alien Buddha Publishing, March 2022). Her debut book of photography *Songs of the Creek* (Alien Buddha Publishing, April 2023) was recently published.

+ **B. Lynne Zika**, a long-term closed-captioning editor, is an award-winning poet and photographer. Her recent book, *The Strange Case of Eddy Whitfield*, multiformat, is available through standard booksellers. Her father, also a writer/poet, bequeathed her this advice: Make every word count.

+ **Keith Pearson** lives in southern New Hampshire and works in the math department at a local high school.

+ **Kimberly Horning** is blessed to live by the beach.

+ **Frank Murphy** – no bio submitted

+ **Curtis Blazemore** has been on the planet far too long, publishing various works in between having bad luck and making people rethink their faith in humanity. No matter. He sees sentences in the exhaled smoke and scribbles furiously. He hopes someday to be able to afford a Greyhound bus ticket to Graceland.

+ **Ashley Karlsson's** work has been published in the *Rye Whiskey Review*, *It Takes All Kinds Literary Zine* and *The Dope Fiend Daily*.

+ **Trina McDaniel** is a weirdo hippie living in Lincoln City, Oregon where she works as a Caregiver. She enjoys walking on the beach, talking to the ocean, and listening to way too many comedy podcasts.

+ **Sonja Berry** is currently enrolled in a UCLA writing certificate program, aspiring to pursue a writing career upon completion of 26 years of military service. Her work has been awarded Honorable Mention in the Inspirational/Spiritual category of the 90th Annual Writer's Digest Writing Competition and recent first publication of a CNF essay in *Sunflowers at Midnight* literary magazine. Poems published in *Raw Literary Magazine* and *Tap into Poetry*, and one forthcoming in *Whimsical Press*.

Twitter: @SonjaRBerry1

+ **Susan Isla Tepper** is a twenty years published writer in all genres. Her current project is an Off-Broadway Play on the subject of art and life.

+ **A. R. Tivadar** is a hobby writer from Romania and a graduate of the University of Oradea. She has been published in *underscore\_magazine*, the *Aurum Journal*, *Disturb The Universe Magazine* and *Firework Stories*.

<https://linktr.ee/ARTivadar>

+ **Kushal Poddar** is the author of 'Postmarked Quarantine' has eight books to his credit. He is a journalist, father, and the editor of 'Words Surfacing'. His works have been translated into twelve languages, published across the globe. Twitter- <https://twitter.com/Kushalpoe>

+ **Michael Igoe**, neurodiverse, city boy, Chicago now Boston, Numerous works appear in journals and anthologies (available at [amazon.com](http://amazon.com), [lulu.com](http://lulu.com), [barnesandnoble.com](http://barnesandnoble.com)). National Library of Poetry Editor's Choice Award 1997. Twitter: [MichaelIgoe5](https://twitter.com/MichaelIgoe5). Poetry-in-motion.org

+ **Uchechukwu Onyedikam** is a Nigerian creative artist based in Lagos, Nigeria. His poems have appeared in *Amsterdam Quarterly*, *Brittle Paper*, *Poetic Africa*, *Hood Communists*, *The Hooghly Review*, and in



print anthologies. Christina Chin and he have co-published *Pouring Light on the Hills* (2022).

+ **Christina Chin** is a painter and haiku poet from Malaysia. She is a four-time recipient of top 100 in the mDAC Summit Contests, exhibited at the Palo Alto Art Center, California. She has been published in numerous journals, multilingual journals, and anthologies, including Japan's prestigious monthly *Haikukai Magazine*.

+ **Tracey Sivek** is a native of Northern Michigan. She has work on *Writerscape* and *Cosmofunnel*. She is also the author of "Zero Evidence of Life" found on *lulu.com*. Her publications include *The Abyss*, *Under The Bleachers*, *The Rye Whiskey Review* and *The Dope Fiend Daily*.

+ **Lynn White** lives in north Wales. Her work is influenced by issues of social justice and events, places and people she has known or imagined. She is especially interested in exploring the boundaries of dream, fantasy and reality. Her poetry has

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